DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 263 784 FL 015 406

AUTHOR Park, Wook; And Others
TITLE Critical Issues in the Use and Teaching of the Native Language to Asian Limited English Proficient Students.
PUB DATE 84
NOTE 9p.; In: Language Key to Learning. Selected Papers from the Annual State Convention of the Illinois Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages/Bilingual Education (12th, 1984). Volume V. (FL 015 399).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Bilingual Education; *English (Second Language); *Immigrants; *Language of Instruction; Language Skills; *Limited English Speaking; Linguistic Theory; *Native Language Instruction; Second Language Learning; Teacher Attitudes; Transfer of Training
IDENTIFIERS *Asians

ABSTRACT

A discussion of the use of native languages in the instruction of limited English proficient Asian students addresses three questions: (1) whether the students' native language should be used as a means of instruction; (2) whether there is a transfer of skills from the native language to the second language; and (3) how the language and culture of the language minority children can effectively assist in the learning of English language skills. The discussion draws on information gathered from a survey of teachers of Asian language minority children, observations presented by teaching personnel representing bilingual, English as a second language, and immersion programs serving these populations throughout Illinois, and a dialogue between practitioners and theorists. It is concluded that teaching in the native language is highly recognized and most recommended for concept development and that the transfer of cognitive and academic proficiency is easier than the transfer of basic communicative skills from the native language to English. It is noted that the native language, vocabulary, phonology, grammar, writing system, syntax, learning styles, and cultural implications are similar in most Asian languages, and that these areas do facilitate progress from the native language to English. (MSE)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Critical Issues in the Use and Teaching of the Native Language to Asian Limited English Proficient Students

ED263784

Wook Park, National College of Education
Ovid Wong, National College of Education
Noriko Takada, Evanston School District #65
Stephen Shiu, Chicago Board of Education
David Wong, Chicago Board of Education
Patricia Kim, Chicago Board of Education

Introduction

The use of the language minority children's native language as an effective means of instruction has been recognized in immersion programs (Met, 1984). The native language component is an integral part in bilingual education programs (Illinois State Board of Education, 1976). This paper examines the value of the native language and the assumption of the transferability of skills between languages, and explores effective instructional strategies in teaching the Asian language minority children of limited English proficiency.

The content of this paper draws from three data sources: (1) a survey of the teachers of Asian language minority children; (2) observations presented by the teaching personnel representing well-known programs in Illinois such as those of Evanston School District #65, Schaumburg School District #54, Elgin U-46 , Urbans #116, and of the Chicago Public Schools; and (3) a dialogue between practitioners and theorists. The programs selected have bilingual, English as a second language, or immersion or all of those components serving one or more of the major Asian languages: Cambodian, Chinese, Indese, Lao/Hmong, Japanese, Korean and Vietnamese. The data were gathered and recorded in conjunction with a symposium entitled, Excellence in Education: Implications for the Asian Limited English Proficient Children , which took place at the National College of Education's Evanston campus on November 18, 1983.

The following are the three main questions:

(1) Should the students' native language be used as a means of instruction? (This is a bottom line question for a bilingual education program.)

(2) Is there transfer of skills from the native language (hereinafter L1) to the second language (hereinafter L2 or English)?

(3) How can the language and culture of the language minority children effectively assist the learning of English language skills?

The purpose of the present paper is an overview, organization of thoughts, elaboration of the symposium results, and in addition, a further interpretation of those three issues.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Richard A. Orem

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

FL015402

Should the Students' Native Language Be Used as a Means of Instruction?

In recent years many Asian students have been identified as Limited-English proficient. A limited-English proficient (LEP) student who does not speak and understand the English language in an instructional setting well enough to benefit from schools to the same extent as a student whose primary language is English (Bilingual Vocational Education Project, 1979). For LEP students, the process of knowledge acquisition is at stake because their English communication skills are not well enough developed to learn in an English-only program. Clearly, however, the student may know more than he can express in English. This dilemma is often expressed by a statement like: "I know it, but I have difficulties in saying it or writing it in English". Noam Chomsky and others (Chomsky, 1957) have pointed out that language competence (the ability to understand language) of a person is often greater than language performance (the ability to use language). For the LEP student, learning a new language (e.g. English), this difference is even greater. It follows that using only English as a means of instruction might be unlikely to help the student in attaining and/or expressing concepts. Are there other ways of instruction that might better suit the needs of LEP students? Let us hypothesize that the use of the native language as a means in instruction can provide a way for the LEP student to acquire knowledge of a subject, even though he has not yet developed his English to be able to understand and express ideas. The main purpose of this part of the discussion is an attempt to substantiate the hypothesis from three different studies. These studies are a classroom analysis, a symposium questionnaire survey, and a research finding.

A study was done to compare the learning of two LEP high school science classes at the tenth grade level. One class is a Cantonese-speaking group, and the other class is a group that speaks several languages (Cambodian, Hmong, Laotian, and Russian). The two classes were taught by a bilingual (Cantonese-English) science teacher. To the Cantonese group a regular high school biology text book (Biological Science Curriculum Study) was used and the lessons were delivered in Cantonese supplemented by the use of English. After the lapse of three months, through substantial evaluation, it was found that the students attained both the content and the process of science. Similar text materials were employed to teach the other multilanguage class. However, because of the language diversity English was used as the only means of instruction. At the end of the three months it was found that little content was acquired. However, process acquisition was about the same as the Cantonese class. To remedy the learning situation in the Cambodian-Hmong-Laotian-Russian class and with the permission of the school administration, the textbook was dropped and replaced by another text entitled Science Curriculum Improvement Study (an elementary school program). At the end of the school year, learning of the two classes was compared and analyzed. The Cantonese class that used the native language as a means of instruction appeared to learn more in terms of content than the other class that used only English as a means of instruction.

An Asian symposium was held at the National College of Education

in Evanston in November, 1983. Educators from around the area were invited to discuss and share their ideas on several critical issues in the use and teaching of native language to Asian LEP students. During the symposium, a survey of opinions was conducted in the form of a questionnaire. In particular three questions were selected to illustrate educators' opinions on the use of the native language. The three selected questions and their responses are shown in the table included here. From the questionnaire response it is clear that the majority of the educators, including administrators, teachers, and teacher aides, agree that the use of native language is a useful method of teaching Asian LEP students.

How would education researchers respond to the use of native language? A second language teaching research project was done at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign recently (Troike, 1983). The academic performance of Asian LEP students was studied and analyzed. One relevant finding was that most of the students who achieved best in content areas, as measured by tests in English, were those who had the opportunity to discuss the concepts they were learning in their native language with other children and parents. Even in linguistically heterogeneous classrooms, it was concluded that at least some degree of bilingual education was proving to be feasible, and clearly provides the best context for conceptual development.

In closing our discussion, it is apparent from the three studies that the importance of teaching in the native language is recognized and its value in conceptual developmenmt is high. Therefore, our hypothesis of teaching in the native language is valid.

Is There Transfer of Skills from the Native Language (L1) to the Second Language (L2)?

It can be generally assumed that a French speaker can learn English faster than a Chinese speaker does; a Korean speaker can learn Chinese faster than an English speaker does.

Does a French speaker learn English faster than a Chinese because of the frequency of crosscultural interactions?

The language transfer theory has been explicated by Cummins (1979) by distinguishing language proficiency in two levels: Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) which include pronunciation, basic vocabulary and grammar which are used in interpersonal and communicative contexts, and Cognitive and Academic Language Proficiency (CALP), which includes theoretical concepts and academic terminology used in academic situations. He describes the distinction between BICS and CALP by using an analogy of an iceberg: in our mind we have a much larger reservoir of knowledge, information, and concepts than we can use in our daily interaction. In other words, the external or surface level language skills are merely the tip of an iceberg. He uses the analogy of a double iceberg in explaining the transfer of language and cognitive skills associated with one language into another: It is easier to transfer CALP than BICS of L1 and L2. The easier transfer at the CALP level is possible because of the existence of the common underlying proficiency of L1 and L2, as opposed to a separate

underlying proficiency. The implication then is that for many minority children, L2 CALP can be developed much more adequately by means of L2 instruction.

The question is: Is the Language transfer hypothesis verifiable between an Asian L1 and the English language?

A noted linguist and a theorist of second language acquisition, Kenji Hakuda (1983), commented: A review of studies on the subject would fill no more than five pages; the conclusion is that there is not enough research on Asian-Americans. However, he did recognize the phenomenon of transfer, more often because of contrastive differences rather than similarities, between an Asian L1 and English. For example, R/L distinction, or lack of it, is one contrastive feature. He noted that the Japanese learners were as good as the English learners in perceiving the difference, and encouraged the use of a contrastive table of various languages.

Recognizing the lack of research on the relationship or transferability between an Asian L1 and English, we take pride in opening a dialogue with classroom teachers on this issue through surveys and open forums. Teachers, teacher aides, and program coordinators provide the second source of evidence, the experiential. One agreement that came out of the November symposium was that a good reader in a native language tends to be a good reader of the English language. This statement seems to verify a research survey of some 50 teachers and teacher-aides in the Chicago metropolitan area (Park, 1980). There were, however, varied observations as to the teaching of the native language among different Asian language groups.

This tentative conclusion that, yes, there is transfer, at least at the CALP level, between an Asian L1 and English, leads us to the next question: Should we, or should we not, teach the native language before introducing English language arts and reading to non-readers and to native language readers?

A recent major study compiled by the Department of Education (Garcia, 1984) indicates that teachers of 70% of the sampled bilingual education programs use both L1 and L2 as a means of instruction; in 75% of the Spanish-only projects, L1 (Spanish) is exclusively used to first teach reading; the teaching of the native language arts (Spanish) and reading (Spanish) is an important component of the bilingual programs surveyed. Again, unfortunately any discussion with regard to an Asian language and instruction of it seems to be left out in the study.

One would guess on the basis of the growing popularity of the "Saturday language schools" in most Asian communities, that parents have an interest in teaching and maintaining their home languages. However, to what extent they want to have the native language instruction in the public schools available for their children is a question yet to be answered. The parents tend to think that spending time on learning the home language might slow down the linguistic, academic and cultural transition. However, the parents are open-minded to well-grounded suggestions.

Linguists generally seem to agree that before children can learn to read, they must have oral proficiency in the language to be used. This assumption suggests that children should be taught either to read in their native language or that before bilingual children are

introduced to English reading they must have oral command of English. ESL rests on the latter part of the assumption.

A second assumption widely accepted is that when there is a regular grapheme-phoneme correspondence (e.g., Korean), it is easier for the child to learn to read initially in the native language by introducing the relationship between sound and letters using phonics as the basic focus. A local Korean bilingual teacher developed a nice schema to teach English language arts using Korean language skills. A linguist presented language art instruction materials for both English and Korean using the contrastive analysis of differences and sound-letter correspondence (Chu, 1980).

Teaching the native language is a controversial issue because of the lack of research data and time economy. We would like to propose further study for Asian languages on this issue of transferability and the value of teaching the native language. One conclusion is clear: the native language that an LEP student brings with him to school is an important, valuable resource for effective instruction. Unfortunately we seem to know so little about it.

How Can the Native Language Effectively Assist the Learning of English Language Skills?

When Asians are discussed, there is the tendency to consider them as people belonging to one single group. In reality, they represent various countries, and diversified language groups. Among all the differences, there is, however, a thread of commonality and similarity found among the Asians. Seven major features are selected to show this commonality. This commonality does play an important role in facilitating students' progress from L1 to L2 and culture 1 to culture 2.

(1) Vocaulary:

How many Asian words have the same root as English words? Scientific or contemporary common nouns such as "jet," "bus," and "computer" have been adapted to the first language and may retain some resemblance to the original English words, but commonly, words do not have any transferability. Therefore, every word, whether it has a concrete or an abstract meaning, has to be learned through memory work.

(2) Phonology:

Some Asian languages function with fewer sounds than English, while others have more sounds than English. What is even more difficult, is that in some languages there could be four to six different tones differentiating meaning of the same sound. Whatever the case may be, the development of sounds and the need for practice for the Asian LEP students are different for example, from the Spanish speakers. "If" can become "Ip" and "a big dog" might turn into a "pik tok." Some may substitute "see" with "she", and the sound of "sit" may result in a catastrophy.

(3) Grammar:

There are many rules which govern the English language. They are many in number and quite different in nature from L1, and it is

preferable that these rules be explained in the language that the students understand. If a teacher is to list the problems areas, it becomes a litany of difficulties: pronouns, third person singular, the verb agreement, present and past tense, plus coping with irregular verbs, and so on. Some Asian languages depend on "time markers" such as the word, "yesterday" making it unnecessary for the verb to indicate the past. The "number marker", such as the word "three", indicates exactly how many; therefore, the noun remains the same, without the plural indicator.

(4) Writing System

The Latin alphabet is used in the Philippines, Indonesia, and Vietnam. In Vietnamese several tone markers are used to indicate the word meaning. Some other writing systems are phonetic, yet others are pictographic and exceed thousands in numbers to be memorized. Writing direction also needs to be taken into consideration. Some writing systems are left to right, but others are from right to left, or from top to bottom in a vertical manner. It is not that uncommon to find a student carefully decoding a three syllable word, and yet automatically decoding a short connective word from right to left. Many of the writing systems are extremely complex, with a great deal of emphasis placed on "penmanship," "writing ability," and "reading." Students are more often visual-oriented than not, and they feel more comfortable in writing much sooner than other English language learners.

(5) Syntax

"Book opening, 10 page, read, must" is an example of how "Open your book, and read page 10" would look in some other language. English word order is extremely different for some Asian students. Not knowing where to begin a sentence and how to place words in proper order definitely slow down some Asians' oral communication in English. In order to decrease some of the frustration and sense of helplessness, an ample supply of vocabulary sometimes gives them the assurance that they need.

(6) Learning Styles

The educational system in many countries is highly competitive, demanding, and fact-learning is greatly emphasized. On the other hand, there are some places where formal education is minimal and a writing system is non-existent. Many countries place high value on memorization, recitation, and reproduction of great works. Students are given large numbers of assignments and rigid examinations that determine promotion from grade to grade, or level to level.

(7) Cultural Implications

Although Asian LEP students represent various countries and language groups, there are many culture-based commonalities. A tremendous respect is paid to "learning," "a learned person," and "the place of learning."

By almost all groups, "learning" is looked upon as something that requires diligence that sometimes is accompanied by pain or sacrifice, but which can later be rewarded through accomplishments. Many Asian children grow up being told, "Don't say anything unless you have something important to say," or "Gather enough knowledge first and

then discuss." A wise man of few words is held in higher esteem than someone who is just verbal. This view may be based on the Daoistic or Confucius teaching, or it may be because Asian cultures developed among homogeneous groups of people over many thousands of years that they feel quite comfortable having "silent conversation" and are not anxious to verbalize. Having this type of cultural orientation, taking turns at "show and tell," giving "oral sentations" or participating in "discussions" are not the easiest task for the students.

As for non-verbal communication, there are many common behaviors found among the students. They may sometimes seem shy and scared in comparison to their American peers, but in reality, this is a respectful posture in their culture. Students may avoid having eye contact with teachers because that is considered bold and can be interpreted in some culture as a sign of defiance.

Asian bilingual staff strongly feel that there is a very important role they can play during the students' transition period. They can be the interpreters of culture, as well as being teachers of L1 and L2, and facilitators to involve parents in the American school system. The hope is to develop ways to cooperatively work with the ESL staff to assist Asian LEP students.

Summary and Conclusion

Three critical language issues concerning Asian LEP students have been discussed, and the following answers have been identified.

(1) Teaching in the native language as a means of instruction is highly recognized. It is found that the use of native language is of most value in the development of concepts.

(2) According to the language transfer hypothesis, the transfer of congitive and academic proficiency is easier than the transfer of basic communicative skill of the native language (L1) to English (L2). Further research is needed in this particular area.

(3) The native language, vocabulary, phonology, grammar, writing system, syntax, learning styles, and cultural implications are similar in most Asian languages. These seven linguistic areas facilitate students' progress from their native language to the second English.

References

Bilingual Vocational Education Project, Vocational Education for the Limited English Speaking : A Handbook for Administrators. Arlington Heights, Il. 1979.

Chomsky, N., Syntactic Structures . The Hague: Mouton, 1951.

Chu, H., Transferability of Reading Skills between English and Asian Languages. Paper presented to the Symposium on Bilingual Research-Asian American Perspective, sponsored by National Institute of Education, Los Alamitos, Ca., 1980.

Garcia, G., Special Report on Research Findings: Summary Abstract of the Classroom Instructional Component Study, National Association for

Bilingual Education News , 7 (3), 1984 (Spring).

Cummins, J., Linguistic Interdependence and the Educational Development of Bilingual Children. Review of Educational Research , 49, 1979, 222-51.

Hakuda, K., English Language Acquisition by Speakers of Asian Languages. In Mae Chu Chang (Ed), Asian and Pacific-American Perspectives in Bilingual Education , New York: Teachers College Press, 1983.

Park, W., Instruction in the Bilingual Classroom: An Asian Perspective, Paper presented to the symposium on Bilingual Research-Asian American Perspective sponsored by the National Institute of Education, Los Alamitos, Ca., 1980.

Troike, Muriel Saville. Teaching and Testing Both Communicative and Academic Skills in English as a Second Language. In Seidner (Ed), Issues of Language Assessment: Volume II Language . Illinois State Board of Education, 1983.